

# On critique

## Between 'nature' and 'customs': childhood in the age of enlightenment in France

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# ONCE UPON A TIME...

- a 'story-telling' dealing with : Critique, History, Childhood
  - **Critique** (and change):
    - \* theme of the ESA Congress
    - \* theoretical framework : pragmatic sociology of critique
  - **History** :
    - 'Enlightment' as a touchstone for criticism
    - A historical perspective focused on 'disputes'
  - \* **Childhood** : analysing critiques, justifications and tests about 'learning to walk' (Garnier, 1995)

# THE 'CENTURY of CRITIQUE' : XVIIIth

The debates about learning/teaching WALKING

⇒ **Wide range of questions in the debate :**

\* **Children** : What is 'good' ? What are they able to do ?

\* **Adults** : How should adults behave ? Definitions ? (a typical 'test' : when the child fall down / emotions)

• **C/A** : Differences and shared humanity (/animality)

⇒ **Linking definitions of adults' practices toward children and 'history of ideas'** : political, scientific, pedagogical,

⇒ **The importance of childhood's material culture and the body** (matching objects - children) : 4 kinds of artifacts

# BABY'S WRAP ( 'swaddling clothes' ) ( '*maillot*' )



# BABY WALKER ( 'go-carts' ) ( '*chariot*' )



# BABY WALKER ( 'go-carts' ) ( 'chariot' )



# LEADING STRINGS ( 'lisières' ) 1645/m

XIXe



# PUDDING HAT ( 'head-pad' ) ( '*bourlets*' )





# METHODOLOGY

- **Construction of a corpus of discourses** : 5 books (education - care)/ 10 Years (1750–1900)
- **Categorization** :
  - - Critique : BWr, BWa, LS, PH, Help
  - - Advice : BWr, BWa, LS, PH, Help, 'carpet' (space)
- **Analyzing Arguments and Tests** (*épreuves*)  
genealogy of the problem in discourses :  
discontinuity, rarity, rules for accumulation
- Principle : following the actors inside the dispute

# TIME FOR THE CRITIQUES...

‘Old’ critiques : advice for using the objects / ‘good’

□ Ex : **Simon de Vallembert** (1565) danger of body’s deformations (weakness) / need for careful protection, security and support

New critiques (up 1750) : to get ride of artifacts / ‘useless’

□\* Baby wrap (consensus) pain, weakness, lack of mvt

□\* Baby walker : deformation, difficult removal

□\* Leading strings : deformation, bad habits...

□\* Pudding hat (less criticized) : not dangerous ???

# TIME FOR JUSTIFICATIONS (1)...

- **‘Old’ justifications of the artifacts** : standing up straight between earth and sky : the humanity of the child / animality-weakness (ref: God’s order)
- **Naturalistic justifications against** (Buffon, 1749)
  - Strong ‘savages’ / degenerated civilized countries
  - Anatomical differences between monkeys / humans
- ⇒ Natural sciences definition of humanity (grounded / facts)
- ⇒ Division between ‘nature’ and ‘customs’ (or ‘prejudices’ ) => **Room for developmental approach** : observations and ‘steps’ (Dr Deleurye, 1772), diseases (Dr Billard, 1828)... norms / age

# ROUSSEAU (1762) : CRITIC of WRAPPING

- ‘When the child draws its first breath do not confine it in tight wrappings. No cap, no bandages, nor swaddling clothes. Loose and flowing flannel wrappers, which leave its limbs free and are not too heavy to check his movements, not too warm to prevent his feeling the air. Put him in a big cradle, well padded, where he can move easily and safely. As he begins to grow stronger, let him crawl about the room; let him develop and stretch his tiny limbs; you will see him gain strength from day to day.’ (L1)

## Different types of ‘TEST’ :

- Negative (weakness) : child confronted with artifacts by adults
- Positive (strength) : child confronted with gravity, improving himself; best ‘judge’ : reflexivity (action toward himself : French ‘se’)

# ROUSSEAU (1762): A RADICAL CRITIC

- ‘Emile shall have **no head-pads, no go-carts, no leading-strings**; or at least as soon as he can put one foot before another he shall only be supported along pavements, and he shall be taken quickly across them. Instead of keeping him mewed up in a stuffy room, take him out into a meadow every day; let him run about, let him struggle and fall again and again, the oftener the better; he will learn all the sooner to pick himself up. The **delights of liberty** will make up for many bruises. My pupil will hurt himself oftener than yours, but he will always be merry; your pupils may receive fewer injuries, but they are always thwarted, constrained, and sad. I doubt whether they are any better off.’ (L2)

# TIME FOR JUSTIFICATIONS (2)...

= Pb of interpretation : Rousseau : fiction, principle / facts

• The 'state of nature' / traditions of political philosophies (Hobbes, Montesquieu, Grotius, Burlamaqui, Pufendorf...)

- Shared humanity (C+A) : sense of self-freedom and perfectibility (impossible to qualify)
- Mediated domination ('Nature' /Adult) upon children
- Self determination of the child, intrinsic legacy/becoming
- Impossible representation of children by adults

= Political institutions as condition of freedom : politic and moral humanity (/romantic valorization of childhood/adulthood // nature)

# Leading-strings as POLITICAL SYMBOL

KANT (1784): Critique of leading-string /adults as 'minor'

'First, these guardians make their domestic cattle stupid and carefully prevent the docile creatures from taking a single step without the **leading-strings** to which they have fastened them. Then they show them the danger that would threaten them if they should try to walk by themselves. Now this danger is really not very great; after stumbling a few times they would, at last, learn to walk. However, examples of such failures intimidate and generally discourage all further attempts.'

# Baby-walker and political caricature (1791)



*Le Promenoir Royal ou La suite en Empire  
Par un Oiseau sous son des brins de la Chaise*



# Baby-walker and political caricature (1791)



# An ENDLESS DISPUTE... Material culture : in museum and/or new meanings of objects



# Changing Representations of 'lifecourse'



# CONCLUSION

- Recent debates in sociologies of childhood and children : nature/nuture-culture; being/becoming
- Some of the propositions / pragmatic sociology of critique
  - to ‘follow the actors’ : empirical analysis of operations of purification and mediation (/debates concerning theoretical definitions of childhood)
  - to worry about ‘adulthood’ : a relational thinking (shared humanity and order, differences and relations)
  - Moral and political sociology : pertinence of Rousseau’ s problem : how to ‘respect the freedom of the child’ ?

# THANK YOU for your QUESTIONS



# Some references

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